

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6330

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TUNIS 2395

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, TS
SUBJECT: UGTT CONGRESS REAFFIRMS TRADE UNION INDEPENDENCE
AND MILITANCY, SUPPORTS HABIB ACHOUR

REF: TUNIS 2046

1. SUMMARY: THE GENERAL UNION OF TUNISIAN WORKERS' CONGRESS HELD MARCH 24 TO 27 WAS A RESOUNDING SUCCESS FOR HABIB ACHOUR. HE WAS UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED TO ANOTHER FOUR-YEAR TERM AS UGTT SECRETARY GENERAL AND WAS GIVEN AN EXECUTIVE BOARD PURGED OF NON-TRADE UNION ELEMENTS CONNECTED TO THE DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY. THE CONGRESS GAVE ITS FULL SUPPORT TO PROME MINISTER NOUIRA'S "SOCIAL COMPACT" SIGNED JANUARY 19 BY THE GOT, UGTT AND BUSINESS AND FARMERS' ORGANIZATIONS AND PROMISED THAT THE UGTT WILL WORK TOWARD GREATER PRODUCTIVITY. UGTT APPROVED HOWEVER, OUTSPOKEN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STATEMENTS THAT INDICATE A WILLINGNESS TO TAKE PUBLIC STANDS AT VARIANCE WITH GOT LINE. THE UGTT ALSO DROPPED OBVIOUS HINTS DURING CONGRESS THAT IT HAS OTHER POLITICAL OPTIONS THAN SUPPORT FOR PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA. ACHOUR IS LIKELY TO USE THIS CONGRESS AS A BASIS FOR HIS FUTURE POLITICAL ACTION, DRAWING FROM UGTT ECONOMIC POLICY POSITIONS TO ARGUE FOR A BETTER SHARE OF THE ECONOMIC PIE FOR WORKERS
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AND POINTING TO THE APPARENT DEMOCRATIC NATURE OF THE CONGRESS AS EVIDENCE OF HIS POPULAR SUPPORT AMONG THE MASSES. END SUMMARY.

2. THE UGTT QUADRENNIAL CONGRESS HELD FROM MARCH 24 TO 27 CONSTITUTED A MAJOR TOUR DE FORCE FOR TRADE UNION LEADER HABIB ACHOUR. HE WAS UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED TO ANOTHER FOUR

YEAR TERM AS SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION AFTER TURNING ASIDE A SUGGESTION FROM THE FLOOR THAT HE BE ELECTED UGTT SECRETARY GENERAL FOR LIFE WITH COMMENT THAT HE WAS ONLY A FALLIBLE HUMAN BEING AND SUCH A MANDATE WOULD BE INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE UGTT'S DEMOCRATIC TRADITIONS. BALLOTING FOR THE UGTT'S EXECUTIVE BOARD INCREASED ITS MEMBERSHIP FROM 12 TO 13 AND REMOVED ELEMENTS THAT ACHOUR CONSIDERED MORE LOYAL TO THE PSD THAN TO THE UGTT. MOST SIGNIFICANT OF THESE WAS MUSTAPHA MAKHLOUF WHO HAS NO TRADE UNION BASE AND WAS A KEY FIGURE IN MOHAMED SAYAH'S OCTOBER 1975 ATTEMPT TO UNSEAT ACHOUR AS UGTT LEADER. MAKHLOUF HAS ALSO SERVED (ABRASIVELY, WE UNDERSTAND) AS TUNISIA'S WORKER REPRESENTATIVE ON THE ILO GOVERNING BOARD. NEW, YOUNGER FIGURES HAVE BEEN ADDED TO THE UGTT EXECUTIVE BOARD, INCLUDING THE LEADER OF THE TEACHERS' UNION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TUNIS. THIS UNION HAS TAKEN AGGRESSIVE ANTI-GOT POSITIONS AND COULD BE CHARACTERIZED AS LEFTIST. ITS JOINING EXECUTIVE BOARD INDICATES THAT ACHOUR IS WILLING TO ACCEPT UNORTHODOX VIEWS IN HIS GENERALLY CONSERVATIVE DOMAIN.

3. UGTT CONGRESS WAS ALSO VENUE FOR THOROUGH AIRING OF TRADE UNIONISTS' VIEWS ON GOT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICY. WHILE UGTT OFFICIALLY SUPPORTED PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA'S FIVE YEAR "SOCIAL COMPACT" AND ACHOUR'S INAUGURAL SPEECH (SEE REFTEL) HAS WARM WORDS OF PRAISE FOR NOUIRA, THE UGTT ADOPTED BLUNTLY WORDED ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL POLICY STATEMENTS WHICH SET FORTH POSITIONS AT VARIANCE WITH GOT POLICY. NOTABLY, THE UGTT CLAIMED THAT THE GOT'S CONFIDENTIAL

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COST OF LIVING INDEX (ON WHICH SALARY INCREASES UNDER THE "SOCIAL COMPACT" ARE TO BE BASED) IS UNDERVALUED BY GIVING TOO MUCH WEIGHT TO PRICE-CONTROLLED FOODSTUFFS. UGTT ALSO SAID THAT THERE IS A GROWING GAP BETWEEN INCOME FROM LABOR AND INCOME FROM PROPERTY AND THAT THIS SHOULD BE CORRECTED. IT ASSERTED THAT WORKERS, THROUGH THE "STAGNATION OF WAGES," HAVE CONTRIBUTED A DISPROPORTIONATE SHARE TO THE ACCUMULATION OF INVESTMENT CAPITAL. THE UGTT DEMANDED THAT TRADE UNIONISTS BE GIVEN REPRESENTATION ON THE GOVERNING BODIES OF BANKS SO THAT THE FINANCIAL SYSTEM CAN PROMOTE WIDER AND MORE EFFICIENT DEVELOPMENT.

4. THE UGTT CONGRESS CRITICIZED EXPORT INDUSTRIES

ESTABLISHED UNDER THE LAW OF APRIL 1972 FOR EXPLOITING WORKERS. IT ALSO CALLED FOR REFORM OF THE LABOR CODE AND SAID THAT GOT INFORMATION POLICY "MUTILATES" THE FREEDOM AND OBJECTIVITY OF NEWS. ACHOUR TOLD THE CONGRESS

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THAT HE BELIEVES THAT THE MINIMUM WAGE SHOULD EACH \$160
PER MONTH IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

5. IN ADDITION TO THESE POLICY STATEMENTS, THE UGTT
PUBLISHED A LONG TREATISE DURING THE CONGRESS THAT SET OUT
ITS VIEW OF WHAT GOT POLICY SHOULD BE. TITLED "A MORE
RAPID DEVELOPMENT, A MORE JUST DEVELOPMENT," THE TREATISE
CALLED FOR VARIOUS ACTIONS IN THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC
FIELD THAT VARY FROM POLICIES NOW FOLLOWED BY
PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA. MOST NOTEWORTHY, HOWEVER, WERE
UGTT STATEMENTS CALLING FOR INDEPENDENT TRADE UNION STUDIES
OF ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, A INDICATION THAT THE UGTT DOES
NOT TRUST THE VERACITY OF GOT STATISTICS AND ANALYSES
OF ECONOMIC CONDITIONS.

6. THE CONGRESS PAID ITS RESPECTS TO PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA
AND PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA IN MESSAGES SENT TO THE TWO
GOT LEADERS. THE UGTT EXPRESSED ITS "RELIEF" AT THE
PRESIDENT'S COMPLETE RECOVERY, THANKED HIM FOR HIS CONCERN
FOR THE WELFARE OF WORKERS AND HIS EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF
LIBERATION STRUGGLES, AND EXPRESSED HOPE THAT GOD WOULD
LEAVE HIM WITH THE TUNISIAN PEOPLE FOR A LONG TIME TO COME.
FOR NOUIRA, THE UGTT EXPRESSED ITS SATISFACTION AT HIS
ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENTS AND HIS PROMOTION OF CONSTRUCTIVE
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DIALOGUE. IT ALSO NOTED ITS SUPPORT FOR POLICIES THAT PROMOTE A MORE EQUITABLE DIVISION OF WEALTH AND PROMISED TRADE UNION SUPPORT FOR NOUIRA'S POLICIES TO INCREASE PRODUCTION AND TO RESTORE SOCIAL PEACE IN WORK PLACES IN A CLIMATE OF MUTUAL RESPECT AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS.

7. IN ADDITION TO KUDOS, ACHOUR HAD BARBS FOR BOURGUIBA AND NOUIRA AS WELL. WHEN THE CONGRESS PROPOSED THAT ACHOUR BE NAMED UGTT SECRETARY GENERAL FOR LIFE, HE TOLD THEM THAT HE WAS ONLY A HUMAN BEING WHO COULD MAKE MISTAKES AND THAT SUCH A MOVE WAS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE DEMOCRATIC NATURE OF THE UGTT. WE UNDERSTAND THAT BOURGUIBA WAS INFURIATED AT THIS REMARK WHICH COULD BE INTERPRETED AS CRITICISM FOR HIS PRESIDENCY FOR LIFE OF TUNISIA. ALSO, WE HEAR THAT BOURGUIBA SPECIFICALLY ASKED ACHOUR NOT TO LET TAIEB BACCOUCHE (LEADER OF THE UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' UNION) BE ELECTED TO THE UGTT EXECUTIVE BOARD, BUT THIS REQUEST WAS NOT RESPECTED. TUNIS ALSO BUZZED OVER ACHOUR'S PERSONALLY READING A GOODWILL MESSAGE FROM MOHAMED MASMOUDI (A CLOSE FRIEND OF ACHOUR) DURING THE CONGRESS. THIS MESSAGE HAD KIND WORDS FOR BOURGUIBA AND ACHOUR AND COUNSELED SETTLEMENT OF CONFLICTS AMONG TUNISIANS AND WITH TUNISIA'S NEIGHBORS. THIS PUBLICITY GIVEN TO MASMOUDI COULD NOT HAVE PLEASED HEDI NOUIRA.

8. THE UGTT CONGRESS CAN ONLY BE CALLED A VICTORY FOR ACHOUR AND, IT SEEMS, FOR FREE TRADE UNIONISM AS AN INDEPENDENT FORCE IN TUNISIAN SOCIETY. WHILE ACHOUR MADE CLEAR THAT HE SUPPORTS NOUIRA AND HIS POLICIES HE ALSO MADE IT CLEAR THAT THIS SUPPORT IS NOT UNCONDITIONAL. READING THE MASMOUDI MESSAGE WAS UNDOUBTEDLY A WARNING TO NOUIRA THAT THE UGTT HAS OTHER CARDS TO PLAY IF HE LETS THEM DOWN BY GOING BACK ON HIS PLEDGES TO PURSUE MORE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH. THE UGTT ACCEPTANCE OF LEFTISTS ON ITS EXECUTIVE BOARD AND ESPOUSAL OF ECONOMIC

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POLICIES TO THE LEFT OF THE GOT'S INDICATE ALSO THAT ACHOUR WILL NOT SACRIFICE HIS ORGANIZATION'S REPRESENTIVITY WITH THE WORKERS FOR THE SAKE OF KEEPING IN LINE WITH GOT POLICY.

9. A VICTORY FOR ACHOUR, THE UGTT CONGRESS IS PROBABLY ANOTHER IRRITANT TO PARTY ELEMENTS WHO RESENT HIS INDEPENDENCE AND RELATIVE POLITICAL INVULNERABILITY. THE CONGRESS'S OUTSPOKEN ECONOMIC POLICIES WILL ALSO PROBABLY DISTURB BUSINESS GROUPS WHO ARE CONSCIOUS OF THE RISING POWER OF TUNISIAN TRADE UNIONISM AND THEY MAY SEE IT AS A THREAT TO THEIR ENTREPRENEURIAL PREROGATIVES IN SOCIETY.

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